



JOHN ADAMS
CONDUCTS

AMERICAN ELEGIES

ORCHESTRA OF ST. LUKE'S

WITH

DAWN UPSHAW, SOPRANO PAUL CROSSLEY, PIANO



7559-79249-2

JOHN ADAMS AMERICAN ELEGIES

CHARLES IVES

1 **THE UNANSWERED QUESTION** 4:49(late version)
Peer International Corporation (BMI)**FIVE SONGS**(ARRANGED FOR ORCHESTRA BY JOHN ADAMS)2 **Thoreau** 1:493 **Down East** 2:234 **Cradle Song** 1:215 **At the River** 1:146 **Serenity** 1:52DAWN UPSHAW, SOPRANO2, 4, 5 Marlon Music, Inc. (BMI)
3 Peer International Corp. (BMI)
6 Associated Music Publishers, Inc. (BMI)

INGRAM MARSHALL

7 **FOG TROPES** 9:59Iso Music (BMI)

MORTON FELDMAN

8 **MADAME PRESS DIED LAST WEEK AT NINETY** 4:10Universal Edition/European American Music (BMI)

JOHN ADAMS

9 **EROS PIANO** 14:50PAUL CROSSLEY, PIANO
Red Dawn Music, Inc. (Hendon Music, BMI)

DAVID DIAMOND

10 **ELEGY IN MEMORY OF MAURICE RAVEL** 6:19Southern Music Publishing Co., Inc. (ASCAP)ORCHESTRA OF ST. LUKE'S
JOHN ADAMS, CONDUCTOR

Elektra Nonesuch

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JOHN ADAMS AMERICAN ELEGIES

CHARLES IVES (1874-1954)

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(late version)
Peer International Corporation (BMI)

FIVE SONGS

(ARRANGED FOR ORCHESTRA BY JOHN ADAMS)

2 Thoreau 1:49

3 Down East 2:23

4 Cradle Song 1:21

5 At the River 1:14

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DAWN UPSHAW, *SOPRANO*

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3 Peer International Corp. (BMI)
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INGRAM MARSHALL (b. 1942)

7 FOG TROPES 9:59

Ibu Music (BMI)

MORTON FELDMAN (1926-1987)

8 MADAME PRESS DIED LAST WEEK AT NINETY 4:10

Universal Edition/European American Music (BMI)

JOHN ADAMS (b. 1947)

9 EROS PIANO 14:50

PAUL CROSSLEY, *PIANO*
Red Dawn Music, Inc. (Hendon Music, BMI)

DAVID DIAMOND (b. 1915)

10 ELEGY IN MEMORY OF MAURICE RAVEL 6:19

Southern Music Publishing Co., Inc. (ASCAP)

ORCHESTRA OF ST. LUKE'S
JOHN ADAMS, *CONDUCTOR*

On the 25th anniversary of John F. Kennedy's assassination, John Adams and I were both, separately, watching a television program about the event. We were both deeply affected by the images of Americans mourning the death of their young President. One scene in particular had caught our attention: a long slow-moving camera shot of the quiet and somber faces of the mourners as they waited in long rows along Pennsylvania Avenue for the funeral cortege to pass by. To this scene of intense quiet and inward emotion the music of Charles Ives's *The Unanswered Question* had been added by the film's director. Later, John and I both remarked on the unmistakably American quality of the "elegiac strain," and the extent to which our musical heritage is described by it. I suggested an album of American music that had this emotion as its central idea.

John eventually took the concept in a direction I had not anticipated, retaining the sense of elegy without the sentimentality often associated with this kind of music. He orchestrated five Ives songs for Dawn Upshaw, and suggested other pieces with very different expressions of this idea by such widely divergent personalities as Morton Feldman, David Diamond and Ingram Marshall. The Feldman work, *Madame Press Died Last Week at Ninety*, inspired a new piece from John: an elegy in memory of Feldman. This turned into *Eros Piano*, a 15-minute (almost) piano concerto that inhabits a very different world than that of *The Unanswered Question* but still retains the essentially quiet, reflective mood which is shared by all of these remarkable pieces.

ROBERT HURWITZ

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

BY INGRAM MARSHALL

All the music on this recording is American, but the individual pieces share a commonality beyond that. In tone and feeling, all of them could be called elegiac. The works by Morton Feldman and David Diamond were actually written as elegies, and the others seem to have associations of lament and memory. *The Unanswered Question* has that famous reiterative trumpet call — the question itself — which, to this ear, alludes to a bugle call: Taps. Ives' "cosmic landscape," his "Contemplation of a Serious Matter" (to cite his own tags for the piece), might be seen as an elegy for the inharmonious folly of the world itself. The five Ives songs evoke views of the past tinged with regret. *Fog Tropes* has always seemed to me a mourning piece, although for whom or what I cannot say. In *Eros Piano*, the solo pianist seems to lead us, and the orchestra, through a sensuous, dreamy landscape in search of something unknown; it is a kind of an unspecified elegy for lost times or things not quite remembered.

THE UNANSWERED QUESTION

The musicologist Wayne Shirley has suggested that Ives was inspired by Emerson's poem "The Sphinx," in which the phrase "the unanswered question" appears. If so, Emerson's own explanation of his poem, conveyed in an 1859 essay, may help us understand Ives' music. "If the mind live only in particulars and see only the differences (wanting the power to see the whole—all in each), then the world addresses to this mind a question it cannot answer, and each new fact tears it in pieces, and it is vanquished by the distracting variety."

The argumentative tone of Ives' flutes may indeed be voices of "fact" in distracting variety. The work's structure—a layered texture of three strata, which co-exist in separate worlds — conspires to create a harmonious whole by its very dissimilarity

FIVE SONGS

The five Ives songs here recorded in orchestrations by John Adams seem well suited to this treatment. (Some of the touches, such as the sleepy, bluesy violin slides in "Cradle Song," are more Adams than Ives.) The understated instrumentation strongly enhances elegiac qualities of memory, sentiment, even nostalgia.

Despite his enthusiasm for the Transcendentalist writers, Ives seems to have been a man of relatively unsophisticated literary taste. For his songs, he frequently used poems by himself or his wife, or employed popular verse of the mawkishly sentimental type. Yet the music is original and free of banality; it uses sentimentality towards greater artistic ends. This seeming contradiction makes sense if one considers Ives' exposure to "old time religien" as a frame of reference for his interest in the Unitarianism and Transcendentalism of Emerson.

Some of the songs seem to bear witness or allude to Ives' more ambitious works. In fact, "Down East" shares with the Fourth Symphony a quotation from "Nearer My God To Thee" that first appeared in the "Down East Overture," now lost. In the last movement of the Fourth Symphony, the hymn serves as a powerful underlying ostinato, surfacing near the end, hummed gently by a choir. However, the song "Down East" uses the hymn's strains in an almost whimsical way, yet still with a potent suggestion of memory.

"Thoreau", of course, is derived from the last movement of the Concord Sonata; all that's missing is the solitary flute sounding over Walden Pond. "At the River" comes from the second movement of the Fourth Violin Sonata. Though "Serenity" has no obvious connections to other Ives works, the repetitive figure in the accompaniment bears a moody resemblance to Feldman's Madame Press — demonstrating that to a long list of twentieth - century innovations which Ives is supposed to have arrived at first, we could perhaps add minimalism.

FOG TROPES

Fog Tropes borrows some harmonic ideas from my *Gradual Requiem*, but follows no scheme or system. I was searching for a certain feeling to accompany the mournful sound of fog horns, and picked the sonorities and notes which seemed appropriate: environmental (mostly marine) sounds plus vocal and "gambuh" (a bamboo flute from Bali) interspersions.

The synchronization between the "live" brass parts and the sounds on tape is not always precise. In this respect, *Fog Tropes* bows somewhat in the direction of *The Unanswered Question*, whose separate worlds cohabit a common sonic landscape. But there are deeper connections to Ives and also to Feldman, to the extent that they were — and still are — often taken to task for their reliance on intuitive, rather than systematic, methods.

More and more, I come to realize that I, too, am an essentially instinctual composer. My music seems to grow in its own soil and without much predetermined detail. In this regard, I feel significant affinities with the composers here.

MADAME PRESS DIED LAST WEEK AT NINETY

Madame Maurina Press became Morton Feldman's piano teacher when he was twelve. She came out of the Russian tradition, supposedly having taught the Czar's children. She had been close to Scriabin and this is what she gave the young Morton to play, along with Busoni transcriptions of Bach. Feldman felt that, because she wasn't a disciplinarian, she imparted "a vibrant musicality" as opposed to any kind of "musicianship." Perhaps the Feldman sense of registration, pitch and timbre derive from her tutelage. "The way she would put her finger down, in a Russian way of just the finger. The liveliness of just the finger. And produce a 'B- flat,' and you wanted to faint" (Morton Feldman, Essays).

Feldman mentioned her influence on numerous occasions. When she died in 1970 at the age of 90, his need to write some kind of elegy was more than sentimental. It is one of his first pieces to use steady-state rhythms and a certain amount of repetition. The carefully plotted, almost plodding footsteps of the individual notes, and of individual instruments — like those magical notes adumbrated by Madame Press herself — evoke a musty parlor: something European and far away. A coo-coo clock goes off and never stops. Feldman's famous soft sonorities, subtle attacks, and "tender" harmonies are all here. It doesn't strike me as a typical Feldman piece, but it must be one of his most heartfelt.

EROS PIANO

John Adams comments: "*Eros Piano* began as an elegy on the death of Morton Feldman. I was mindful of how John Cage had first described Feldman's music as 'erotic' but then later decided that it was heroic. I have always felt that both of Cage's descriptions were correct. As examples of extended musical architecture, of a radically new attitude toward the flow of time, Feldman's works — especially the late ones — are certainly heroic in what they attempt. But on the microscopic level, his music was always sensuous, erotic, obsessed with gradations of touch and the subtlest shifts of color.

"Another feature of Feldman's music, which I call the 'fetish,' the obsessively reiterated motive or gesture, also suggests another composer, Toru Takemitsu. Both composers have created musical structures by lingering over and over on a single small detail. 'Madame Press' is a case in point, as is Takemitsu's piano concerto, *riverrun*.

"My piece became an homage to both composers. I take a transposed version of the Takemitsu 'fetish,' the falling, sighing perfect fifths first heard in the piano, and lead it through a different dream world, one teeming with my own musical subconscious."

ELEGY FOR MAURICE RAVEL

When David Diamond was in his early twenties and living in Paris, studying at Nadia Boulanger's American School at Fontainebleau, he had a number of opportunities to meet with Ravel. Diamond had earlier regarded Ravel as a musical hero, and these subsequent meetings prompted Diamond to conclude: "Ravel's music remains to me the ideal... the most perfect, the most imaginative and the most moving contemporary music" (David Diamond, *Autobiography*).

Ravel's death in 1938 devastated the young American composer; he wrote the elegy within a few days of the event. There isn't a trace of "homage" in the musical sense — no Ravelian harmonies or quotes. The language is very much Diamond's — modal harmonies, clear formal structure, direct and expressive writing.

The original *Elegy* was scored for brass and percussion. The following year, Diamond re-orchestrated it for strings and percussion, and this version has been by far the more widely performed. In John Adams' opinion: "The language of Diamond's 'Elegy' is very much a style of the 1930s. What sets the piece apart from other music of the period is an absence of clichés. Its rough-hewn, tragic quality is quite special — not the least ingratiating or deliberately 'simple' or 'folksy' as so much of the Americana of the period could be."

THOREAU

(Paraphrased by Charles Ives from *Walden* c. 1915)

He grew in those seasons like corn in the night,
rap in reverie, on the Walden shore,
amidst the sumach, pines and hickories,
in undisturbed solitude.

DOWN EAST

(Charles Ives, c. 1919)

Songs! Visions of my homeland,
come with strains of childhood,
Come with tunes we sang in the school days
and with songs from mother's heart;

Way down east
in a village by the sea,
stands an old, red farm house
that watches o'er the lea;
All that is best in me,
lying deep in memory,
draws my heart where I would be,
nearer to thee

Every Sunday morning,
when the chores were almost done,
from that little parlor
sounds the old melodeon,
"Nearer my God to Thee, nearer to Thee;"
With those strains a stronger hope
comes nearer to me.

CRADLE SONG

(Augusta L. Ives, 1846)

Hush thee, dear child to slumbers;
We will sing softest numbers;
Nought thy sleeping encumbers.

Summer is slowly dying;
Autumnal winds are sighing;
Faded leaflets are flying.

Brightly the willows quiver;
Peacefully flows the river;
So shall love flow forever.

AT THE RIVER

(Text and music Robert Lowry, 1864)

Shall we gather at the river,
Where bright angel feet have trod,
With its crystal tide forever
Flowing by the throne of God?

Gather at the river!

Yes, we'll gather at the river,
The beautiful, the beautiful river,
Yes we'll gather at the river
That flows by the throne of God.

Shall we gather?
Shall we gather at the river?

SERENITY

(John Greenleaf Whittier)

O, Sabbath rest of Galilee!
O, calm of hills above,
Where Jesus knelt to share with Thee,
the silence of eternity
Interpreted by love.

Drop Thy still dews of quietness,
till all our strivings cease.
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess,
the beauty of thy peace.

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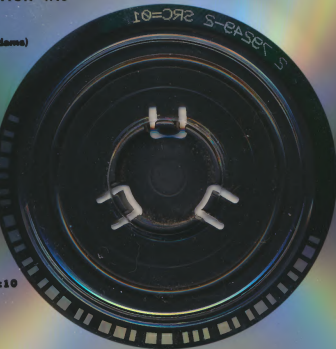
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